

# **The ‘Other’**

**Exploring: How do Adult Early School Leavers  
understand, negotiate and perform within the Adult and  
Community Education learning environment.**

**Lisa Beakhurst**

**MEd Adult and Community Education 2018-2019**

**Department of Adult and Community Education**

**Maynooth University**

**Student ID: 14711501**

**Date submitted: July 2019**

**Thesis Supervisor: Brid Connolly**

**DECLARATION**

In submitting this research project, I confirm that it is my own work, that it has not been presented in whole or part for any assessment in Maynooth University or elsewhere, and it does not contain any unacknowledged material from any source, published or unpublished.

Lisa Marie Beakhurst

### Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the continual support from my supervisor Brid Connolly and all the relevant staff of Maynooth University who have constantly shown and given me unbelievable support and encouragement throughout my time studying in Maynooth University. Thank you for listening and guiding me, but most of all for believing in me and that I thank you all so much, Michael Murray, Fergal Finnegan, Camilla Fitzsimons, Michael Kenny and all the staff of Maynooth University that have lent me their ears, I would also like to thank my fellow students I thank you.

To my wounded healer Tommy Genockey thank you for showing me how to find something that was alien to me Education, You Rock. Also thank you to Niall Walsh and Christopher Woods, for holding the door ajar. I thank you pushing me through that door and showing me the that road less travelled. I would also like to thank the staff and students of the Pathways project. My second family, thank you.

To my family for all of your supports, all the ups and downs you were with me all the way, thank you.

To Majella, there are no words that could thank you for all you have done, listening to my melt downs and talking back from the edge. Thank you for your help, unconditional support and encouragement my friend, I thank you.

At this time, I would also like to thank the many Teachers and facilitators of Adult and Community Education who do an amazing job and are an inspiration to many.

Last but by no means least thank you with all my heart. To my Phoenix, for taming my demons and flaming my rise to a world beyond my wildness dreams.

**Thank You All.**

### **Dedication**

*I wish to dedicate this thesis to my grandparents. I always felt their guidance, strength and belief in me throughout my studies.*

**Table of Contents**

Cover Page	Page 1
Declaration	Page 2
Acknowledgement	Page 3
Dedication	Page 4
Table of Contents	Page 5
Background of my Research	Page 8
Research Question	Page 13
Statement of Broad Topic	Page 14
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
1.1 Introduction	Page 15
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
2.1 Literature Review	Page 18
2.2 Profile of Participants who took part in the research	Page 19
2.3 Autoethnography	Page 20
2.4 The Other	Page 20
2.5 Self-Actualization and Hierarchy of Needs	Page 22
2.6 Social Class	Page 23
2.7 Political Process of Education	Page 26

2.8 Social Division	Page 27
2.9 Social Learning	Page 29
2.10 Early School Leavers	Page 30
2.11 Access to Education	Page 31
2.12 Further Education and Training	Page 32
2.13 Gender Privilege	Page 34
2.14 Gender Inequality	Page 35
2.15 Conclusion	Page 38

### **Chapter 3**

3.1 Methodology and Research Question	Page 40
3.2 Statement of Broad Topic	Page 40
3.3 Proposed Interview Questions	Page 41
3.4 Student Questions	Page 41
3.5 My Ontology and Epistemology	Page 42
3.6 Qualitative Methods	Page 44
3.7 Ethical Considerations	Page 46
3.8 Interview Consent Form	Page 48
3.9 Participants Statement	Page 49

**Chapter 4**

4.1 Social Class Page 50

4.2 Early School Leaving Page 53

4.3 Lone Parent Page 56

4.4 Social Division Page 57

**Chapter 5**

5.1 Discussion of Findings Page 59

5.2 Data Analysis Page 62

**Chapter 6**

6.1 Conclusion Page 74

***Bibliography*** Page 76

**Background of My Research**

For the purpose of this research project I would like to give a brief history of my early education and also an insight into my life. This will give the reader an insight into the background of my research and give an understanding of why I choose this topic early school leaving and further adult and community Education. I will than explore how class and gender have played roles in shaping my education and my life outcomes.

I was born in Ballymun then raised in Darndale and Drimnagh. When I became a mother I moved to Fatima Mansions and then to St Michaels Est. These areas were considered to be working class and had reputations for being tough areas to live in.

As a child I lived in Darndale in the North side of Dublin and when I was ten my family and I moved to live in a council estate in Drimnagh on the south side of Dublin where most of the people living there had bought their homes. It was difficult to settle in Drimnagh at first because we were considered outsiders coming from a working lower-class background. My brothers got into a lot of fights with the new neighbours.

Over time thought we became accepted. Looking back, we were picked on because we were labelled as bad and not trustworthy as we came from a rougher part of Dublin. I felt different and talked different to the others but eventually adapted to their way of talking and behaving. We eventually did become part of that community

The schools I went to were overcrowded and children with learning disabilities tended to be left behind. When I was ten, I was diagnosed with dyslexia. I was in a new school and the teacher asked me to spell my surname in front of the whole class and I couldn't. It was the first time I was challenged by a teacher and I was left feeling ashamed and I still feel that shame today which is hard to accept.



The teacher brought it to the attention of my mother, along with everyone in my class. Prior to that I hid in class and tried to stay anonymous. I was told that I had the reading skills of a six-year-old. When I was asked to read in class and in front of my class mates I would not be able to. This made me angry and I would react and I would get smacked regularly and put out of the class. It seemed as if I spent most of my school years standing outside the door as punishment for my reactions to not being able to read. I was expelled from School at thirteen because of my behaviour. I would say that this experience was soul destroying to me. I left school a very angry person and I felt like that I would never amount to anything. I felt like my right to education was just taken from me.

When I was expelled from school at thirteen, I believe my gender influenced this because I was a girl in a large male household. During this time, it was the norm that females would get married and become the home maker and it was just accepted by individuals in society that female's education was not important. I remember the teachers saying to my Mother, that I would not be able to complete my junior certificate as I found reading really difficult and they suggested that I should find a husband and he would look after me.

However, it was great to be free from school. I didn't see myself as working or lower class because I didn't know what the words meant. I did feel poor though so when I got the opportunity to work, I took it. My gender influenced this because women were expected to get married and their education was not seen as important.

My first job was as a scrubber, the word scrubber was used to name people mostly women who earned a living from cleaning up after others. It was my mother who got me the job. I then got a job in an electronics company working on an assembly line. My uncle got me that job. I always dreamt of being a hairdresser but I felt that this dream would never become a reality as I felt that not having my junior cert meant that I was uneducated and not suitable for this type

of work. However, I did work consistently until I was seventeen doing mostly low paid work. My father collected my wages and gave them to my mother. She would give me pocket money out of it. I never saw a payslip back then.

In comparison my brothers all collected their own wages and gave my mother their weekly contribution. I was aware that I was being treated as a second-class citizen because I was a woman and my mother wanted to control me. Looking back, I can see the different ways that men and women were treated. Mothers wanted to control their daughters as a way of protecting them from harm's way and also from any shame that could be brought to their door. I was the only girl and I feel now that my mother wanted to control me because she had no power in a house full of men. I also lacked confidence because of the way I was treated in school.

Because I was female, I was treated differently to the males in my house and my community. This social difference also was there when it came to work. I became pregnant at seventeen. My father didn't talk to me till my child was born. It might have been due to the stigma. As a single mother some people in the community saw us as free loaders. I went to the clinic in Drimnagh to get a cot but the welfare officer refused me and told me to put my child in a drawer.

As a single mother back then there were no opportunities for legitimate work. There was part time work as a cleaner or scrubber. Today it's completely different, single mothers have more access to child care and can-do part-time courses or go to work.

I didn't think I was a special mother but I went out of my way to make sure my children did their leaving cert. However, the more I thought about it the more I realised I fought tooth and nail for my kids. I was even escorted out of the school for insisting one of my children needed extra help. Looking back, I feel my own mother although she did fight for me, she was more

compliant with my teachers, I would never just accept the teacher's word and I did fight for my children. I made sure my children completed their leaving cert and they did.

When I look back at my life, I know I was lost in addiction for some time, however I never thought my life was a bad one. That is till I came to university in 2015. My experience of university has brought me into contact with lots of middle-class people. I still feel a sense of being inferior due to my background and where I come from. However, that too is improving because I found education has given me a vocabulary and knowledge to argue about things I care about. I care about understanding my history and using it to tell my story and see if it is similar to others who have struggled with life in general.

Through reading and researching it has become apparent to me that people are stereotyped and labelled by researchers. It is sad to read research papers that label people as the 'underclass'. I never felt I was underclass till I read the paper "Prison Fails". The research paper "Prison Fails" is a true reflection of the lives and experience of those of us who have lived in Fatima mansions and St Michaels Est. I have lived in both these areas. I was researched when living there, this is me. This was the first time I felt the shame that comes with understanding your class and consequences of a lack of education.

I was treated differently because I was a woman by my mother by my brothers and by society. I did not have the life chances that middle-class people have because I lived in poverty for most of my life. I was not aware of this until I came to college. In today's world class and gender matters. If you are a woman you can be discriminated against because of your gender. It gets worse if you are a woman from a working-class area.

I believe now that it's the opportunities we are given which can determine our life chances. If you are born in an upper-class area your life chance will get you what you need. Middle class people expect their children to go college and become professionals like teachers. It is much

more difficult for working class young people to go to college because they are expected to get work when they leave school at a young age.

However today I do feel blessed to have lived the life I lived. I would say that my experiences in education has made me a strong woman today. I am also so proud that I have got the opportunity to go to university and the fact that I am the first person in my family to go to university makes it even more significant. I feel that my future prospects will be much greater now due to the fact that I have gotten back into education. I have become employable and am worth a decent wage. I also hope that these new opportunities will not only have an effect on myself, I hope they will affect my whole family.

**Research Question.**

**Working title for the study:** How do Adult Early School Leavers understand, negotiate and perform within the Adult and Community Education learning environment?

**Statement of Broad Topic:**

The purpose of this research is to explore how early school leaving impacts on individuals in a learning environment within the Adult and Community Education setting. The central consideration of this research is the experience of early school leaving and the impact this has on individuals who become adult learners and what they encounter in a contemporary Dublin classroom environment.

The aim of the proposal is to look at what supports there are for individuals that are early school leavers, what supports are currently available, and what access is available for individuals who are hoping to get into the Adult and Community Education setting?

The key themes are: What impact has early school leaving on individuals and the implications of early school leaving on individuals within Adult and Community Education? How do individuals who are early school leavers, understand, negotiate and perform within a learning environment within the Adult and Community Education learning environment?

## Chapter 1

### 1.1 Introduction

Early school leaving is a process whereby children leave school at an early age regardless of their circumstances. The law in Ireland today states that under the Education Welfare Act 2000 the minimum school leaving age should be 16 years. Prior to that it was 15 years, or the completion of three years of post-primary education. Parents are required to ensure that their children attend a recognised school from the age of 6 to the age of 16 years (Citizens Information 2019).

At present the national agency Child and Family Agency has responsibility to ensure that every child in the country attends school regularly or receives an education. The agency also informs the government of school attendance and education provision. Education welfare officers are employed by the agency to provide support and advice to parents and schools and are responsible for checking for absences from school (Citizens Information 2019).

During the 1990s the alleviation of early school leaving had been identified as a social policy agenda priority in Ireland in a wide range of documents (Fleming and Murphy, 2000). The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) in 1997 pointed out that early school leaving was among the most serious social and economic problems that the state must address. NESF also outlined that early school leaving is also a challenge for adult education (NESF 2000). According to the NESF estimates tell that approximately 900 – 100 pupils do not transfer over to secondary school (NESF, 1997).

Early school leaving can be defined in four different categories, (1) a student that has not completed post primary school, (2) those that have completed primary school but not transferred to post primary school. It can also be defined as (3) those who have attended junior

cycle courses in a post primary school but who leave without taking the junior cert examinations. (4) Also those who have taken the junior cert examination but fail to continue into the senior cycle in post primary school.

Addressing levels of adult education in Ireland was first aired in 1973. The Murphy Report was the first official acknowledgement of an adult literacy problem in Ireland. There was a subsequent Kenny report in 1983, which was the first state report to have lifelong learning as a central theme, but made little impact on national statistics. Since then planned reform of Ireland's education system and with regard to higher education and further education and training has formed a focus on creating the right opportunities for Irish Adults. The Further Education and Training Strategy (FET) 2014 - 2019 represents the first five-year strategy for the further education and training sector in the history of the state (eolas 2019).

This thesis will give a brief outline on what life was like for those including myself as an early school leaver in Ireland and how accessing adult education developed the skills in order to continue into third level education. Previous literature outlines the lack of life chances and lack of opportunities individuals have in gaining decent well-paid employment. Research tells us what the consequences are of early school leaving, and it tends to focus on the poorer employment prospects of those without a qualification.

The research also outlines how people who left school early will face a lower earning potential and an increased likelihood of living in poverty. The Organisation of Economic Development (OECD) outline that basic literacy and numeracy skills are considered to be vital for full involvement in economic and social life.

These skills play an important role in the lives of early school leavers as those who drop out of school do so partly because of literacy and numeracy problems which leads to poorer job prospects as a result of these lower skills.



This thesis will also give my account of how my early school leaving played a big role in my life because I could not progress into sustainable employment. The research conducted for this thesis is an autoethnography, where I the researcher will give an account of my own personal experience. I will connect this autobiographical story to a wider, cultural and social aspect of early school leaving. According to Ellis et al (2011) an autoethnography is a narrative research approach that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience (Ellis 2011).

I will also talk about going to school with a hidden disability, and how the disability was not picked up until I was ten years old. This thesis will also examine data which I gathered from three other people, two who had dropped out of school at an early age and I will compare this data with an individual who lived and grew up in an area that had high unemployment and very little resources but who managed to complete second level education. The information that has been gathered in this research is rich data. The data is from each respondent and the methods I used in gathering this research was conducted by semi-structured face to face interviews on an individual basis. For some individuals who could not meet me, the respondent emailed their information based on the same list of questions that was used for individual's meetings.

It is envisaged that the information and data that has been gathered will enlighten further research to be conducted to encourage policy makers and/or government bodies to listen and understand the importance the stories of people with a hidden disability and the challenges that these individuals face on a daily basis when trying to access the labour market.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### 2.1 Introduction

In Best's book he attempts to explain and understand social divisions. Best argues ideas about the nature of social division and how they are used to give an individual resource in a process of self-definition, which Best calls subjectification. However, subjectification concept is not solely about self-definition; subjectification however will only be possible within the relation to social division.

Therefore, Best argues that for subjectification to be successful there needs to be a creation of the category of the Other – a process that has become known as alterity. Alterity is a German word that means Otherness; Alterity is a direct link to order and social division which both are social constructs, this is not the same as the distinction that arises between the individual and others that is based on differences of individuals. Best argues that we must keep in mind that social division is not a static thing, but it is a reflection of a dynamic set of processes.

However, in this process we institutionalise the cultural assumptions or prejudices that define a person through our laws and customs. In short, we may define ourselves as 'we' yet at the same time how the process of 'subjectification' allows for us to look at the 'Other' as not part of the 'we' (Best 2005). For me, my early childhood education was a time of great shame, this shame I carried with me for a long time into my adult life. I returned to education late in my adult life; I will look to argue in this thesis how education is a powerful force that can encourage or break a person and how education is the foundation for the base of a person's life outcomes and life chances.

My literature review for my thesis has very much a focus around social class and inequality within education. I will also look at how education is class based holistically and the inequality

that education recreates in Irish society within some individuals and social groups. As part of my research, I am using an autoethnography method, as a connection to the research rather than an analysis. According to Frank (2000) he explains this is a rising process, it is used as a method of telling a story, that has personal connections rather than an analysis.

## **2.2 Profile of the participants that took part in the research**

Three people came forward to take part in my research when I was discussing this through my network of friends. Tony is a facilitator in an adult education centre. He has worked there for a considerable amount of years. Tony is a mature person that grew up in a working class area, he is due to retire over the next couple of years. Tony is a married man with a grown up family. Tony informs me that he has a passion for learning which he developed over his adult life. Tony believes education is a major gateway to progress through life, and reaching one's higher self-actualization. Siobhan is an early school leaver like myself who actually returned to adult education and also believes the same values about education that Tony and I believe in. Siobhan is a mature lady who never married and has reared her son as a single parent and has overcome an awful lot of economic, social and cultural bias within the capitals. Siobhan however, came from an upper class area while been reared with the religious congregation. Edel however not an early school leaver, but comes from a social economic disadvantaged area, but with education Edel has progressed. Therefore, she is added into the research to compare and contrast how education does work to gain self-actualization.

## **2.3 Autoethnography**

Autoethnographers vary in their importance on Auto (self) ethno (social, cultural, connection) and graphic (the application of research process), (Reed – Danahay, 1997). Autoethnography can be an exciting and promising qualitative method that offers a way of giving a voice to a personal experience for the rationale of understanding a sociological occurrence.

Autoethnography can also be a difficult process according to Wall (2006). She acknowledges that it is more of a philosophy than a well-defined method. According to Wall (2008), Autoethnography is a story about self-writing by you. It is also an examination of behaviour and ideas of groups such as Early School Leavers and this is an example of the social and cultural relationships in my research. According to Clough (1998), no subject can be a fully self-identified, fully aware, or fully intentional author, because an unconscious desire makes fully intentional subjectivity impossible.

## **2.4 The Other**

The Other, in Shaun Best's (2005) book is an attempt to explain and understand social divisions. Best argues ideas about the nature of social division and how they are used to give an individual resource in a process of self-definition, which Best calls subjectification (Best, 2005). However, subjectification concept is not solely about self-definition; subjectification however will only be possible within the relation to social division.

Therefore, Best argues that for subjectification to be successful there needs to be a creation of the category of the Other – a process that has become known as alterity (Best, 2005).

Alterity is a German word that means Otherness; Alterity is a direct link to order and social division which both are social construction, this is not the same as distinction that is between the individual and others that is based on differences of individuals (Best, 2005). Best argues that we must keep in mind that social division is not a static thing, but it is a reflection of a dynamic set of processes (Best, 2005). However, in this process we institutionalise the cultural assumptions or prejudices that define a person through our laws and customs. In short, we may define ourselves and at the same time look at how the process of 'subjectification' allows for us to look at the Other as not part of the we (Best 2005).

The 'Other', who is the 'Other' and how does a person that lives in a growing modern society become 'The Other'? (Best,2005). In Ireland citizens are born into a highly structured society. Irish society is divided into social class, these structures that influence society and how a person will experience the social world. Social institutions, particularly Education, have the power to reinforce social inequality and this is what I will examine in this literature review. Education has the power to kill the soul of a child or the power for them to believe they can be whatever they so choose.

Best (2005) The '*Other*' is a focus within my thesis, as I will argue how early school leavers are seen as the Other. Social divisions and the 'Other' is how Best outline's how individuals feel on feeling not part of the rest of society. Best argues that social division influences and shapes identity. Our place in society is determined by social divisions. These things that divide us can be our class, race, gender, age, sex and sexuality. Disability, mental illness, and ethnic diversity are also things that divide us from others. If you feel you do not fit into what is seen as normal in society and you end up excluded just like early school leavers (Best 2005).

As an early school leaver, I felt like 'The Other' for most of my life, yet I had to come to Adult Further Education to gain an understanding of this, I hope that my thesis looks into this further. I will give an overview of Abraham Maslow's Self Actualization and Hierarchy of Needs. This will give an understanding of how they impact people's behaviours and their life outcomes. I will also give a brief history on social class and show how social class plays roles in shaping one's life and their life chances within education. Furthermore, the focus of this research will be to explore and establish from a clear theoretical viewpoint give significant information on how adult and community education can change the lives of those that are early school leavers. The research will also look at the effects it has on the community as a whole. I will then go on to explore how Adult and Community Education play a role in bringing about change within a

person's life chances. The research will also look at barriers and supports that early school leavers face when trying to access or on entering or are going into adult and community education.

## **2.5 Self-Actualization and Hierarchy of Needs**

Maslow's 1943 paper, on a theory of Human Motivating is a theory in psychology where Maslow explains theories of human developmental through a process of personal needs. Some of Maslow's ideas within the theory focus on stages of human growth. His theory creates a system that was seen as a universal need of society. The aim of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory is to reach self-actualization in the fifth stage. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs this will have an impact on how one behaves and the outcome of one's life. The basic physiological needs such as air, food, water, sleep, heat, safety and shelter must be met for a person to survive before a person can even begin to have their higher needs such as the need to love and be loved and self-actualisation met. Maslow used the terms physiological, safety, belonging and love, or social needs, esteem, and self-actualization. This was how Maslow explained how humans drive to achieve their full potential (Maslow 1943).

Maslow puts emphasis on basic needs, and stresses: *"if one is constantly worrying about meeting such requirements other areas of living standards like feeling love, belonging, trust, form relationships and respect for self and others; then self-actualisation the final stage is highly unlikely as one's basic needs of food and shelter must be met before one's social and emotional well-being can progress"* (Maslow 1954).

For example: a student that has had no money for basic needs like clothing other students wear or due to poverty might not have enough money for lunch. These students will find it difficult to concentrate on a curriculum and therefore find it hard to ever reach his or her full potential, i.e. his basic needs must be met before moving on to the next stage. Maslow looks at the whole

physical, academic social and emotional virtues of the person, and how this impacts them on their learning and its outcome (Maslow, 1970).

Maslow has a holistic approach towards education and argued that the purpose of education and educator are about supporting, encouraging and developing the individual to reach their full potential (Maslow, 1970).

He also maintains that if individuals have had no opportunity for a decent basic education or they cannot find employment or if they do find employment, it may be badly paid with little rewards, this can lead to a bleak future and with no chance of “self-actualization” ever being realized (Maslow, 1954). However, as people move and complete their education with hopefully the qualifications they need to find employment, people begin to establish themselves and their life journeys independently (Maslow, 1954).

Additionally, if people have cultural, social, human and economic capital they are more likely to have social mobility. If they don't have cultural, social, human and economic capital, this can block social mobility and keep them locked in a poverty trap (Maslow, 1954).

## **2.6 Social Class**

Ireland is a hierarchical class structured society. The class and place a person are born into will affect their life opportunities. Such as which school one will attend, also if they are likely to attend University (Considine and Dukelow, 2009). As one's education shapes you not only academically, it also affects how one is seen in society. The right education gives individuals opportunities to change social capital, cultural capital, human capital and economic capital (Curry, 2011).

Karl Marx argues that there are two social classes distinguished by labour power and labour forces (Giddens, 2009). This division of labour also distinguishes between the bourgeoisie (the oppressors, wealthy capitalist class) and the proletariat (the oppressed or poor working class).

Marx argues that these social structures in society only benefit the Capitalist class thus enabling them to maintain their power (Giddens, 2009).

Social class, which according to Giddens (1997) comes from the individual's wealth, power division or inequity in human society, is what creates hierarchal class structured societies (Giddens 1997).

Irish society is structured in this way as there is a large economic divide between the social classes of broadly, upper class, middle class and working class/lower class. Social class is mainly a direct association of a person income, wealth, education, culture, status, power and birth-right in Irish society (Considine and Dukelow, 2009).

Social class creates restrictions for individuals from a working-class background for social mobility in society causing social class conflict. An example of culture educational is: if one's parents or family members have not attended 3rd level education, then it is less likely that their children will. So, the way one thinks of education and behaves therefore will be shaped primarily by your environment (Young, 1990).

In Ireland one of the main factors that affect the type of education one receives and the inequalities that are within education is social class. There is division that can be seen in the education system in Ireland. Education in Ireland is class based, as the high class or the oppressors are more likely to send their children into private education and the low class or oppressed into public education (Lynch and O'Neil 1994). Also, as the higher class are more likely to invest money in their children, such as paying money for school grinds., Equality of resources are usually more dependent on a person's economic resources and they will benefit fully along with the opportunities that education can offer (Lynch and O'Neil 1994).

Education is an agent that reinforces class inequality along with other social and economic injustices (Lynch and O'Neil 1994). According to an ESRI study, early school leavers are from



a working-class background, and will have experienced economic and social inequalities (ESRI, 2009).

Lawler (2005) argues social class is a result of a historical and dynamic process along with a position of political struggle. We only have to look at the current cabinet in Ireland and those who are responsible for influencing changes in society like policy making within the education system. Almost a third of these politicians have attended private education (Independent 2016). Consequently, the status quo of the structural disadvantages within the public education system continues. As important decision makers in the Irish Government would have some awareness, but not a personal understanding of disadvantage within the education system (Lynch, 2016). Current government policy toward higher education is mostly working towards economic benefits and not necessarily social benefits (Brine 2006).

Power and inequality transpire within education from the policy and decision-makers. As power relations continue to be maintained within education, from the aspect of pedagogy and curricula. Education creates docile pawns for the elites of society which can be seen in many forms such as inclusion or exclusion, representation, or misrepresentation, integration or marginalization (Lynch and Baker 2005).

Brine argues that low knowledge skilled workers are viewed as problematic for the EU, as they are invariably the most marginalised within society and include: unemployed, disabled, those from ethnic minorities, early school leavers, lone parents, ex-offenders and senior citizens (Brine, 2006). Best argues that those listed above are seen as "The Other" (Best, 2005).

In addition, Brine argues that current policy on lifelong learning is geared towards economic rather than social benefits and that EU policy initiatives effectively create a two tier of 'High knowledge-skilled' learners (associated with higher education and the 'knowledge economy') and 'Low knowledge-skilled' learners (associated with adult and further education and the 'knowledge society') (Brine 2006).

## **2.7 Political Process of Education**

The ideological basis and political process underlies the Education system within Ireland. The role of Irish Government on Social Policy is said to be about social justice and reducing inequalities for the wellbeing of all Irish citizens (Considine and Dukelow, 2009).

However, the meritocracy that is within the Irish education system promotes inequality, as those who are powerful politically can use their power to maintain and ensure that their ideals are the ones that are upheld within society. This oppressor's violence is a way that the powerful not only maintains their power it also helps them to support the justifying of an ideological basis within education (Freire, 2017).

This can influence all areas of society and leads to advantages and disadvantages within education, regarding the quality of life an individual has and their life chances in relation to how social policy is framed (Considine and Dukelow 2009). Education helps in determining your life chances and the cultural capital, economical capital and human capital you need to succeed (Curry 2011).

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) argues that social mobility and one's life chances are very much determined by their social position that a person holds at the start. Society is not based on meritocracy and that is very much so when it comes to the educational system. It is based on those that are in a privileged position who will most certainly have an advantaged position on entering the educational system therefore will have a much better position at the end of their educational expedition. Unlike those that are from a less privileged background. Bourdieu argues that this is not only from generation to generation, but it also shows that the educational system has worked and continues to work in a way that reproduces inequality in society (Bourdieu 1984).

Ireland has changed very much so over my life time. Today Ireland is a multicultural society. However, there is still a lot of prejudice and discrimination toward some of these new groups in Irish society. This unfairness has always been there. There are those who are seen as outside of the so-called social norm. Best argues this as "The Other" (Best 2005). The systematic inequality in social groups and individuals creates for many an unmerited society and feelings of social exclusions (Best, 2005).

Many theorists have argued that equality is not always available to groups in our society. For example, Giddens (2006) points out to us that systematic patterns of discriminations, unfairness or inequality with many ethnic minorities' groups, migrants and other social groups in the workplace and Irish society today (Giddens, 2006).

Another example is when a lot of migrant and ethnic workers are hired for cheap labour by private companies for private capital. A lot of their rights have often been ignored, they work long hours for low income and insecure terms of employment (Giddens, 2006). However, education is seen as a central link to the development of the economy as the government view it as strategically interlinked with national planning (Giddens, 2006).

## **2.8 Social Division**

*“Poverty is not an accident. Like slavery and apartheid, it is manmade and can be removed by the actions of human beings.” Nelson Mandela.*

How we experience life can be down to geography or luck of where you are born and the class of which you are born into. We all live and share this society with other humans. Still, this

society we share is not always fair and equal. Although we may be all the same, yet we are viewed differently in society. Ireland is a welfare state; the most significant division in Ireland is class (Considine and Dukelow, 2009). Nonetheless, I have come to see that Ireland has the neoliberal model embedded into Ireland's modern Irish society.

In Irish society we are categorised by the class we are born into and it's the luck of the draw which straw you pull. Your social capital and cultural capital are there from day one. Your name or family name, your families' social status and how they are viewed in your community and wider society. This has a lot to do with how others treat us, and what opens doors to economic capital. Hence, how we are seen in society is about your wealth, (or lack of), are you part of the haves or the have not's, do you have power or feel powerless (Brine, 2006). An example of this would be when Bell Hooks argues that girls who came from poor backgrounds tried to fit in with the wealthy girls by using their beauty or style. (Hooks, 1993) Bell didn't have the finances that other students had. Bell stated that she only befriended women who were not wealthy in her first year in college and how there was very few from working class area's in college.

We are told that the role of Irish Government in Social Policy is about social justice and reducing inequalities. Yet people living in poverty very seldom feel that the government is looking after their needs. This Conservative attitude towards class and around poverty, plays a role in how social policy is developed, who and how individuals or group's needs are looked at, and how they will be met (Considine and Dukelow, 2009).

According to economist Sen (1999), poverty is not just about having inadequate income, it is the lack of ability to participate in the economic system, along with the absence of capabilities,

such as security, whereby people feel insecure on a daily basis because they do not have enough money to get by or reach their full potential as a human social being (Sen, 1999).

Vulnerable groups according to Combat Poverty (2008) include: women, older people, single parents, people with disabilities, people with low education qualifications, people on the lowest incomes, local authority tenants, people in disadvantaged areas, homeless people, non-Irish/migrant nationals and the Travelling community (Combat Poverty, 2008). These groups and individuals are identified as low knowledge-skilled.

In 2019 these groups face being marginalised in Irish society, and more often they are very much the faces that are seen within Adult and Further Education (Brine 2006). Iris Young (1990) argues that there are five faces of oppression, which are more likely to experience exploitation: marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence (Young 1990). This is a form of class domination, argues Young, which that creates a lack of moral agency and autonomy (Young 1990).

People that are living in poverty have come to rely on charitable charity organisations and would find themselves in dire straits without the help of these charities. This is very much so when it comes to education for people that live in poverty. Poverty and education research illustrate time and time again the lack of educational opportunities (Considine and Dukelow 2009).

*“Most human behaviour is learned observationally through modelling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action.”* (Bandura, 1977).

## **2.9 Social Learning**

Bandura (1977) explains Social Learning Theory. It is a human behaviour and the link with a person's interactions and environment influences. Bandura argues that people learn by the

observing of others that are in their environment and the attitudes and behaviour of those around them (Bandura, 1977).

According to Merriam and Caffarella (1999) Social Learning Theory as a theory is similar with constructivism, humanism, behaviourism, and cognitivism (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). However, for a lot of theories this is not the case. Tennant states that this Social Environment viewpoint. Tennant (1997) has argued that Social Learning is more of a 'social environment' view and it encompasses a range of theories and different styles of approach (Tennant, 1997).

Tennant argues like Freire that social processes shapes an individual individually, stressing that Adult Learners need to defy the construction of their environment as this is a place of oppression and alienating (Tennant, 1997). Also, Jarvis (2003) states that there is a relationship between the two as a person and society are one that involves interaction and common influence. Moreover, Mead also states that learning is socially constructed in the mind and self (Jarvis et al., 2003).

## **2.10 Early School Leavers**

The definition or terminology of early school leaving in Ireland is a student that leaves school before they have completed three years of post-primary education, or a person that is abstention before they reach the age 16, Also, if a student leaves the education system without a minimum of five passes in their leaving Certificate or equivalent qualification (EUNEC, 2013). Low or no qualification leaves people open to poor life chances, in not only accessing further education but also the economy, along with their position in society over their whole life span.

With less learning opportunities there is less professional development (EUNEC, 2013). According to Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI, 2009), it is more likely that early school leavers will be unemployed compared to those that have educational qualifications. The

consequence of early school leaving is also they will work in low skilled employment, hold less paid employment, are more likely to have a greater dependency on medical cards, have poorer physical and mental health issues, and higher rates imprisonment, than those that have completed their education (EUNEC, 2013).

Furthermore, early school leavers are likely to become lone-parents than individuals that have higher qualification (ESRI 2013). However, it is also widely known that if a child is brought up in poor conditions, they are less likely to obtain a good education. Likewise, there is also a large association with the level of education a child will have and that of their parent (Björklund and Salvanes, 2011).

### **2.11 Access to Education.**

The Department of Education was formed in 1924. The Minister of Education in 1924 argued for equal access with equality of opportunity for all (Farren, 1995). In the 1920's and up until 1960's in Ireland if you wanted a secondary education you had to pay for it. Primary education was the only education that was free. This made it imposable for people in lower classes to stay in education and this also gave generations of people a belief that education is not for them (Considine&Dukelow, 2009).

In Ireland every child under 16 is entitled to a free education and most Primary and Secondary schools are funded by the state (Department of Education and Skills 2013). However, there are private schools that you must pay a fee to every year, of which the majority still achieve funding from the state (Considine and Dukelow, 2009).

The education system is said to give everyone equal opportunities based on their abilities and achievements, rather than their wealth or position (Department of Education and Skills 2013). However, in some state colleges there is up to three quarters of student that are dependent on

grants to support them, however, these new statistics have also emphasized the scale of class divide in the Irish higher education (Lynch, 2006).

In addition, people can be pigeon holed or even side-lined because of age, gender, social class or how they are seen to fit into society. If a person is from an affluent area they are more likely than someone from a deprived area to attend third level education. In Ireland third level education institutions are mostly supported by the State (Lynch, 2006).

Third level education in Ireland is offered primarily by Institutes of Technology, Universities and Colleges of Education. There are also programmes available for early school leavers or what are known as second chance, for those that left school early or have not got adequate qualifications (Lynch, 2006).

However, if you come from a low social economic background, sending your children to college is something that can very much be out of your financial reach, from buying books, a personal computer for college work, or even been able to afford having the internet is something that can be a crippling extra burden on finances (Lynch, 2006).

## **2.12 Further Education and Training**

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" (*Nelson Mandela*)

Ireland has a two-tier educational system, private and public. In Ireland we are giving the illusion that education is right to everyone and that we have a choice to what school's colleges or universities we wish to attend, yet this is a privilege for the few (Lynch, 2006). Education is



a service that is geared by the market, so those that can afford to pay will receive a higher level of education than those that can't (Lynch, 2006).

Education holds the power to form an individual's life chances and shape your beliefs (Curry, 2011). Education can create either a critical thinking or one that conforms. How one is treated in the Education system in Ireland is based on social class and the education that an individual will receive is according to social class, not one's ability, as one may feel should be the case.

In Irish society a person's only means of creating capital and prospering is within the market place and the only commodity the majority of us have to sell is our human labour (Bourdieu, 1984).

However, there are sections of Irish society that have experienced long periods of unemployment, and a lack of any training for skilled work with and little or a low education (Lynch, 2006).

This leaves such individuals at a greater disadvantage in any capitalist society, as individuals who have low levels of literacy don't have the same means of gaining capital as those that have a good education (Lynch, 2006).

In Ireland today individuals' that dependant on social welfare or persons on low income are reliant on the state to provide them with training to get into or progress within the workforce. This gives the state control over what individuals will learn or what training will be given in educational/training centres, as the majority of training will be geared towards the economic economy market (Lynch, 2006).

Many Adult Further Community and Education, along with community training centres (FET) were erected in the city of Dublin only because of a social policy, to enable people to get back into workforce. Adult Further and Community Education all play a role in providing second-

chance education opportunities for up skilling and promote equal opportunity to bring about equality and social inclusion (Lynch, 2006).

FÁS was established in 1987, by the National Training and Employment Authority, this was taken over by the Department of Social Protection. In 2013 SOLAS was to become the main name face of Further Education and Training. SOLAS policy is mandated from The Further Education and Training Act 2013. Although further education and training occurs after leaving Second level education it is not seen as part of the Third level education system (Department of Education and Skills, 2013).

Many people in deprived areas undertake these courses because of a lack of education and skills, early school leaving or the threat of getting their welfare payments cut or stopped. This would be their only chance of gaining some kind of training for employment (Lynch, 2006). Unlike those that have the privilege and freedom to choose their subjects, or field of study, like most individuals from middle class areas, who finished school, and who continued education, went on to third level education (Lynch, 2006). Privilege in society seen by many theories as a white male Privilege (Hooks, 1993) yet in Ireland the majority of people that are receiving welfare payments are white working/lower class people that like me have seen very little privilege in modern Irish society (Lynch, 2006).

### **2.13 Gender Privilege**

Gender privilege in Ireland is mixed up with class privilege as is gender inequality. Gender and Class structures are imbedded in Irish society; the privilege class trust and succeed in this status quo, yet for some these structures gives fewer or no choice in their life outcomes or chances (Considine and Dukelow 2009). Inequalities can not only affect people psychologically and emotionally, it also limits people's mobility, education, employment, income and social

opportunities (Considine and Dukelow 2009). Assumptions are made about gender along with social class as in which school you attend or where you will work.

Gender wage gaps in hierarchical societies, this concerns females more than males (Considine and Dukelow 2009). Yet one of the most common assumptions is that no matter what class you come from; you are more like to be paid less for your work as woman than a male doing the same job. Therefore, when it comes to economic capital, males are seen as to have more economic capital than their female work cohort (Considine and Dukelow 2009).

However, the position of women has greatly changed in Irish society since the 1970's. Issues such as access to contraception and more freedom of when to start their family (Considine and Dukelow, 2009). Moreover, relationships and family ties are also seen as a female burden, when it comes to a women economic capital, unlike that of her male cohort (Considine and Dukelow 2009).

However, major movement in Irish society regarding equality for women has a lot to do with the Ireland joining the EU (Considine and Dukelow 2009). This was a moving in Irish society away from the church rule and gave women a lot more freedom and opportunists (Considine and Dukelow 2009). An example of this is, when today women stay in education school longer, and in employment the majority of women work outside of the home. However, the majority of this work is low paid (Considine and Dukelow 2009).

Although we have seen significant change in Ireland, the Irish welfare system is built on the male breadwinner model (Considine and Dukelow 2009). This system see's the majority of women as dependants and primary family carers, this can act as a barrier for women in employment field, which leave a high proportion of women in low income employment (Considine and Dukelow 2009).

**2.14 Gender Inequality**

Women who are married or who are depend on her husband's or parent's income are financially disadvantaged by the patriarchal structure of the family, and the power it gives to husbands to control contribution of household income (Considine and Dukelow 2009). Some social policies can lead to gender inequality (Considine and Dukelow 2009). The higher the class you are, the more equal you are, the lower class you are, the more of a divide there is (Considine and Dukelow 2009).

However, if the husband has lower wages than his wife the woman's low income may be more strongly determined by her class position than by her gender. Women from working class backgrounds are unduly socialized, educated and guided into low status, stereotypically feminine service occupations like cleaning, caring, catering, assisting etc. which are often low pay and have little employment security (Considine and Dukelow 2009).

With regard to gender inequality in education, women do better in education, but that does not transfer to labour market ((Brine, 2006). Gender plays a part in subjects in secondary schools, still gender specific. Higher paid work from male dominated sectors in male dominated subjects (Brine 2006). Bell Hook's has spoken about how even though she attended college, she always felt on the outside. Also Bell Hooks argues that girls who came from poor backgrounds tried to fit in with the wealthy girls by using their beauty or style. (Hook, 1993) Bell didn't have the finances that other students had. Bell only befriended women who were not wealthy in her first year in college and how there was very few from working class area's in college.

However not all gender differences can be put down to natural or inherent behaviours, but are the products of the social structures and policies. According to Paula England's article The Gender Revolution she states that women who can earn more have higher or are well educated.

However, she argues that all individuals should have equal rights to the education of their choice and that their achievement and upward mobility are generally valued (England, 2010).

The average income of males is higher across the EU but to different degrees (England, 2010). Research in higher education shows very gender specific degrees/qualifications. Such as structures and policies in social care of Education is heavily female dominated, where engineering is a male dominated (Considine and Dukelow 2009). When it comes to the terms and conditions of some of these occupations can heavily influence gender inequality. Even if males and females are employed in the same industry with equal qualifications females may still earn less than males. Women can seem to be blocked from some jobs or promotions and only get the job if there are not any male candidates (Considine and Dukelow 2009).

Women are not just women, they may also be advantaged or disadvantaged by their class, age, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability etc. In Anderson and Mill's (2010) they say that making men and women different from one another is the essence of gender. They outline that the study of women in society started in the 1960's but in the 1970's the approach to this study was limited (Anderson, Mill, 2010). There was a concept of patriarchy which led to a dualistic perspective of male privilege and female subordination. Women and men were cast as opposites. Each was treated as a homogeneous category with common characteristics and experiences (Anderson, Mill, 2010). From the studies more and more women analysed their own experiences; they began to address the power in relations that created differences among women and the part that privileged women played in the oppression of others (Anderson, Mill, 2010).

Challenges to gender stereotypes soon emerged. Arguments from women about their position in different hierarchies, the women argued that they were not victimized by gender alone but

by the historical and systematic denial of rights and privileges based on other differences as well (Anderson, Mill, 2010).

Yet women entering into employment has increased almost everywhere. In the UK, between 1911 and 1998, the number of women in employment had risen from 29.3% to 44.3%. Women still earn less than men in all countries. In the UK women earned 72% of men's wages (Seabrook, 2002).

The majority of low paid workers in Ireland is women. There is a social structure of class, which shapes the types of employment that women enter. Bourdieu argues that this could be seen as keeping in one's habitus as middle class women are more likely to take up employment in areas that are seen as white-collar work or in the high-class retail market reflecting states of taste, Bourdieu argues that this is symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1986).

However, women from lower classes are more likely to be employed in areas such as the domestic or lower end of the retail area of employment field (Baker, et al, 2005). This created another division of labour with a new working class termed by Savage as the Precariat, the class of working poor that suffer the most from inequality, (Savage, 2015).

With wages decreasing due to zero contract hours, the cost of childcare increasing and private property ownership increasing rents to an unaffordable amount the gap widened. Childcare can cost up to 52% of lone parents net income while it is 29% of a two-parent family (endchildpoverty.ie). Childcare provision in Ireland is the lowest in Europe and there is no system to provide care outside of school (OPEN, 2011).

One in five children in Ireland living in a single parent family, with 41% of the receiving lone parent family payment and 98% of these are women (endchildpoverty.ie). This poverty in our

society is not only produced it is reproduced by structural forces. Poverty levels have increase systematically since the economic crisis in 2008(endchilpoverty.ie).

## **2.15 Conclusion**

Even though Ireland is a welfare state, the most significant division in Ireland is class (Considine and Dukelow, 2009). However, I have come to see that Ireland has the neoliberal model embedded in modern Irish society. As privatization is ruling the Irish nation, with a culture of working-class citizens that has a tendency towards escape, and looking the other way. Education can create either a critical thinking or one that conforms to the statuesque of society. Those that have the privilege and the understanding of how education impacts your overall life outcomes, will invest in their children's education more so than those from a low social economic background.

When you come from a low social economic background capital for anything that is not essential or believed to be essential is not a priority. A small thing like having to buy a book can cause stress, and have a financial burden on the household. This literature review looked at social class and the impact it has on education. I am one of eight children and I am the only one so far that has a third level education. In my thesis I hope to look at why people from low working-class backgrounds are more likely to be early school leavers, and how Further Adult Education impacts individuals when they return to education.

## Chapter 3

### 3.1 Research Question and Methodology.

**Working title** for the study: How do Adult Early School Leavers understand, negotiate and perform within the Adult and Community Education learning environment?

### 3.2 Statement of Broad Topic:

The purpose of this research is to explore how early school leaving impacts on individuals in a learning environment, within the Adult and Community Education setting. The central consideration of this research is the experience of early school leaving and the impact this has on individuals within adult learners and what they encounter in a contemporary Dublin classroom environment.

The aim of the proposal is to look at what supports there are for individuals that are early school leavers, what supports are currently available, and what access is available for individuals who are within the Adult and Community Education setting?

The key themes are: What impact has early school leaving impact on individuals and the implications of early school leaving impacts on individuals within Adult and Community Education? How do individuals who are early school leavers, understand, negotiate and perform within a learning environment within the Adult and Community Education learning environment?

The research questions will be asked to both an educator and a student that has accessed Adult Education and who is an early school leaver, and who are both involved in an adult education



setting. Each respondent will be advised that, they do not have to answer any questions if they do not feel comfortable answering.

Every respondent will be guaranteed privacy when answering any questions and sub-questions.

### **3.3 Proposed Interview Questions**

- What are the implications for those who have not completed their early education, while they are attending adult and community education?
- How are individuals processed in the adult and community education system and what are the implications of Early School Leaving in their process?
- How long have you worked as an educator?
- Have you seen many changes over your time here?
- Can you tell me about your experience with students that are Early School Leavers?
- Can you describe the classroom environment?
- Why do you feel they take part in education?
- Can you tell me about outcomes of students that have moved on from Adult Education?

### **3.4 Student questions**

- Can you tell me about your education background?
- How did you come back into education?
- What are your experiences within this education journey?
- What are the significant factors of everyday life that shape or influence your attendance and advancing within this education program?
- How does this influence your performance within the classroom?

- What are your general feelings on your experience inside the class room?
- Are there any influences that would interest you to attend other education programmes?

### **3.5 My Ontology and Epistemology**

I can see patterns of inequality in the social world; this can be seen throughout history. There are many theorists that have written in great lengths on this topic. When I first read Karl Marx, I remember thinking to myself, why if this has been seen throughout history is it still happening today. Why is there still such a divide in modern society? How do we allow this to continue?

An example of this is me listening to politicians talking about inequality particularly when looking for votes, yet when they have the power to change or do something positive to change inequalities; they choose to support private companies or private business persons, with no regard to the impact on the wider society.

My Ontology is shaped by the inequalities I see and have lived. The people in power rule society from a self-preservation and self-protective point, while those without try to survive day to day on promises of a more equal and better future.

However, my ontology also has a great belief that we can change and we can have a better future. We can take back our personal power and change the outcome of our future. I believe that one way to do this is through education. Adult education has changed my life and has giving great values on who I am today. It changed my reality, my belief in myself. I have also witnessed many others change their lives through adult education, and impacted communities for the better.

However, there are many people today that cannot continue with their education or are struggling with it because of their earlier education experience. My ontology position comes

from constructive perspective, I believe we all have our own views of the social world and our understanding of it, yet we all do not have a choice to choose and change.

My epistemology is we are always learning, knowledge gives understanding, and with knowledge and understanding we can find the freedom of choice to choose and change. My epistemology position I believe is an inter-pretivism perspective. Reality for me has multiple relatives, and it is not fixed or unyielding. Change is a possibility. If you believe you can change, stay open to change and learn meanings, intention and reasons behind beliefs. If we learn to adapt ability and remain open to new knowledge, then change can occur (Black 2006).

The method of methodology is a social science and sociology studying of a research topic (Silverman, 1993). Methodology can be used to explain and understand theory, methods, practice, issues and process of your research. Methodologies in the social sciences and sociology studying of a research topic can give important insights into a relevant phenomenon (Silverman, 1993). It also explains why something is done in a particular way and what ideals are behind them.

Additionally, the methodology shows how the research will be conducted in relation to a research topic. There are two main ways of conducting research using methodologies (Silverman, 1993).

There are two main research methods used when studying a research topic, they are quantitative and qualitative methods. However, some research combines quantitative and qualitative methods. This research is known as mixed methods (Bryman, 2012).

In the research of social science and sociology, the methodologies of qualitative research are central to this type of research. This does not give one hundred per cent accuracy, unlike

quantitative research in which pure science such as chemistry would be predominantly used (Bryman, 2012).

### **3.6 Qualitative Methods**

May (2004) argues that the purpose of using qualitative research is that it can offer a detailed description to your research topic. Qualitative research helps you, the researcher; gain a meaning, an understanding of underlying problems, reasons and opinions of the research topic. This helps the researcher gain knowledge, motivate, develop ideas, discover trends and go deeper into the research topic (May, 2004).

Also, qualitative research will give the researcher a focus that creates meaning and gives an understanding through a rich description. It is a useful method of studying social problems that requires developing an understanding of different social environments. This can also help the researcher bring meaning to individuals within this environment and what this brings to their experience (O'Leary, 2014).

This helps give an understanding of difficulties that may occur for individuals and gives the researcher different philosophical views of the social world. This helps the researcher learn about a number of different human experiences that when combined is subjective of individual's experiences (O'Leary, 2014).

However, quantitative research can play a role when carrying out qualitative research. This is described as a mixed methods approach. This mixed methods approach is not uncommon for researchers of social sciences. For my research I will be using a mixed methods approach which will involve both quantitative and qualitative methods.

This mixed methods approach can work very well, as they actually complement each other and often can help back up findings of your topic of research. Also mixed methods can show multiple levels giving you different views of the research topic (Silverman, 1993).

The methods of research and how they may be measured in my study will be combined with a number of sources that ranging from surveys, data, interviews, textual analysis to field work research. I will source relevant books, newspaper and journal articles, along with various websites to obtain relevant information on the subject.

I will also use social media on relevant Early School Leaving and Adult and Community Education Learning groups and pages as they can be useful, informative, and contain the most up to date coverage on this topic. Additionally, I will watch television programmes that cover the topic within Ireland and further afield. Furthermore, as part of my research I am using autoethnography method, as a connection to the research rather than an analysis.

According to Frank (2000) he explains this is a rising process, it is used as a method of telling a story, that has personal connections rather than an analysis. Autoethnographers vary in their importance on Auto (self) ethno (social, cultural, connection) and graphic (the application of research process), (Reed – Danahay, 1997). Autoethnography can be an exciting and promising qualitative method that offers a way of giving a voice to a personal experience, for the rationale of extending a sociological understanding. Autoethnography can also be a difficult process according to Wall (2006). She acknowledges that it is more of a philosophy than a well distinct method.

As an Autoethnographer, you are the author, where you will give your personal knowledge to the research. Autoethnography begins with personal knowledge and qualitative method research.

I will use self-reflection and personal experience to give social, political and cultural meaning and understanding to this research. When writing an Autoethnography you may also include cultural beliefs of personal culture.

According to Clough (1998), no subject can be a fully self-identified, fully aware, or fully intentional author, because unconscious desire makes fully intentional subjectivity impossible. According to Wall (2008), Autoethnography is a story about self, it is writing by you. It is also an examination of behaviours and ideas, groups such as Early School Leavers are an example of this as this is social and cultural relationships to my research.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

O'Leary (2014), states that ethics refers to a professional 'code of practice' designed to protect and keep from harm the researched from an unethical process. This will also protect the researcher from legal liabilities. The key to ethical considerations consists of informed consent, causing no harm, and a right to privacy.

As a researcher you must also ensure that all of the respondents who participated in the research are over the age of eighteen and that all researches are totally informed of Maynooth University's Ethical Standards in Undergraduate and MA Research (Maynooth University Moodle, 2019).

Maynooth University's Ethical policy states the following: 'The ethics of the Maynooth University must be principal at all times, while carrying out any research projects. The rights and dignity of individual participants in research must be at all times upheld and respected' (Maynooth University Moodle 2019).

The researcher's ethical responsibilities are to ensure no harm will come to any participants, emotional psychological or physical. Confidentiality will be respected throughout this research

process. The researcher will ensure that respect, confidentiality and anonymity of all those that are interviewed and that all their records of accounts are kept anonymous (Boeije 2014).

Each interviewee will be informed that the information that they give in the research will be treated with the upmost respect and with the highest confidences. The researcher will also inform each interviewee that the information they supplied will only be for the study of research. Semi-structured questions will be asked and used for each interviewee, allowing each person to give the researcher as much or as little data as possible.

All individuals will be asked to give consent for interview and will be informed that they can stop the interview at any time they wish or change their mind and withdraw from the study (Silverman 2008). Silverman (2008) asserts that the interviewer will always allow the interviewee the opportunity to withdraw from the interview at any time he or she wishes. They will inform that all information gathered will be kept privately and all names will be for my record only.

The researcher ensures when contacting each interviewee that they are informed of what the research is about, and how the researcher is going to gather the information (Silverman 2008). The researcher will respect the rights, dignity and worth of all interviewees. The researcher will show no prejudice or discrimination while carrying out the research (Silverman 2008).

All of the interviews will be conducted in a safe, quiet setting, in a place that could provide privacy for the interviewee to share their experiences, which will also be a quiet environment to conduct the interview and to allow it to be recorded. The ethical procedures that researcher rigorously invoke allows researcher as the interviewer to provide a level of protection during the interview. Subsequently the researcher will endeavour to provide the interviewee with a level of confidence and protection while assisting the researcher in the interviews (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey 2015: 113).

The interviews will be conducted at a convenient time and place to the interviewee. Privacy in respect to both the interviewee and the researcher involving mobile phone numbers and email addresses will be respected by both parties.

The researcher will outline to all parties involved that the research topic can be of a sensitive nature and all information gathered will be kept on an encrypted device. The researcher will guarantee that the data gathered will be deleted securely when the project is completed, and any hard copies of data will be shredded before disposal (Maynooth University, 2019).

It is for this reason that ethical consideration has informed every areas of the work that the researcher is conducting. The researcher will always refer back to the guidelines that are set out by Maynooth University in relation to ethics while also referring to a number of independent sources on the topic.

### **3.8 Interview Consent Form**

**Project title:** How do Adult Early School Leavers understand, negotiate and perform within the Adult and Community Education Learning environment?

**Researcher:** Lisa Beakhurst

I would like to thank you for taking part in my research and before you agree I would like to inform you that at any time you may stop or withdraw from the interview or the research project up until transcription.

If you have any questions at any time that you wish to explained or feel you do not wish to answer you are under no obligation to do so. If at any time after the interview you feel you are not comfortable with any part of the interview you may contact me and withdrawer any part or whole interview from the research up until transcription. You will be giving a copy of the interview and a copy of the consent form. Thank you.



**3.9 Participants Statement**

I agree that I have read and understand what the research study involves.

I understand at any time I can withdrawer from the interview and study up until transcription.

I consent that my information can be used for the purpose of this research project and to take part in this research while remaining anonymous.

I am satisfied to part in this study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 4.

*The School Around The Corner, is Much The Same.*

### Findings

#### 4.1 Social Class

I was born in Ballymun then raised in Darndale and Drimnagh. When I became a mother, I moved to Fatima Mansions and then St Michaels estate, I now live in Inchicore. All of my addresses are in an economic social deprived area of Dublin. All these areas historically, have a high level of Early School Leavers. Like myself, and many of the schools in these areas, are educational disadvantaged. Also, these areas are considered to be both working and lower class, with reputations for being tough areas to live in, due to high rates of unemployment and poverty levels.

Education gives individuals opportunities to change and grow their social capital, cultural capital, human capital and economic capital (Curry, 2011). Social Class in Ireland is one of the main factors that affect the type of education a person receives (Curry, 2011). A person's education shapes them not only academically, but it also affects how a person is seen and received in Irish society. According to Lynch (2006), she states it is people from the affluent areas that will continue onto third level education. Although some third level institutions offer some courses to early school leavers or students who do not have the required qualifications. Yet parents from a low economic background or families who have poor employment will suffer financial hardship when trying to fund their children into all levels of education (Lynch, 2006).

In an article by O'Brien (2018), who outlines how privileged parents are finding ways to give their children unfair advantages in education in an unequal economical society. Lynch a professor of equality studies in UCD, has called for a systematic review and regulations of the private for profit education market in Ireland at all levels of education (Lynch 2018).

Lynch also points out that without equalising conditions between students, students cannot participate equally in education. Subjects such as music and or an extra language will require extra finance by parents, so therefore these subjects as an example will not be high on the agenda for a disadvantaged low economic school, as this would be seen to be putting an extra burden on already disadvantaged families and schools (O'Brien 2018).

Children and young people from working-class backgrounds achieve lower standardised test scores or examination grades than those from middle-class backgrounds. While young people from higher professional backgrounds are more likely than similarly performing working class young people to go on to higher education (McCoy and Smyth, 2011).

At the age of ten my family moved from a local authority house in the north side of Dublin, to a bought local authority house in the south side of Dublin. This was seen as progression for my family, as this area was seen as an advanced, upper working-class area, rather than a lower-class area that we left behind. This area was more established, settled, and with higher employment levels at that time and with reputable schools.

I recall my first day in my new school. I was ten years old, and this was the first time I was ever challenged by a teacher. I was totally unaware I had any disability or that I was different from other children. I never heard of anyone that had a reading disability. My old school was overcrowded and children with learning disabilities tended to be left to do their own thing. Yet I always felt the same as my peers, unlike how I was left to feel in my new school.

It was at this time I was diagnosed with dyslexia. In my new school the teacher asked me to spell my surname in front of the whole class and I couldn't. As it was the first time to be ever challenged by a teacher, I did not know what to do. I was left embarrassed and carried a feeling of great shame, which still today is hard to accept.

The teacher brought this hidden disability to the attention of my mother, along with everyone in my class. After this I hid in class and tried to stay anonymous. I was told that I had the reading skills of a six-year-old. When I was asked to read in class, and in front of my classmates I would not be able to do so.

This made me angry, which led to disruptive behaviour, and while corporal punishment was still in place in schools, I would get smacked regularly and put out of the class. It seemed as if I spent most of my school years standing outside the door as punishment for my behaviour, from not being able to read. I was expelled from school at thirteen because of my behaviour. I would say that this time of my education was soul destroying to me. I left school a very angry person and feeling unfit for anything good to come of me.

Although my new school was very challenging, I did learn to spell my name in one day, unlike my previous school in Darndale. Even though I can look back now, and understand that my new school then was doing me a favour, I do not believe that any child should ever feel shame in any way for their capabilities. However, if I had to have stayed in Darndale I cannot bear to imagine what my life outcomes may have been.

According to The Educational Disadvantage Committee, it has identified disadvantage backgrounds. Geographic areas as social context effect, as a large number of students in these areas are from poor backgrounds. Educational Disadvantage is defined in the Education Act of Ireland 1998 (Citizens Information 2019).

*'Impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools'.*

*Citizens Information 2019*

According to statistics the scale of the class divides in Irish higher education, up to seventy-five percent of students are reliant on grant supports in many of the state's colleges. Students from upper class areas are more likely to secure degree courses in universities, whereas students from disadvantaged areas will generally take up places in Institutes of technologies as they rely heavily on grants.

#### **4.2 Early School Leaving**

The education system was established in Ireland in 1831 while under English Rule. Special needs provision in Ireland has progressed since the foundation of the state in 1919, while the Department of Education was not in place until 1924. Right up until the 1990s all education and care of children was carried out by the religious orders in Ireland. The Irish government saw children that were outside of the norms i.e. children with a learning difficulty where seem more as a medical problem.

The term early school leaver and or 'drop out' were used in Ireland because of the research that was conducted by Roseingrave in 1971. The term was established from the European Funded Early School Leavers' Project that was started in Dublin from 1979 to 1983 (Roseingrave 1971).

Figures released in 2007, tell that about 14% of students continue to leave school without finishing their education, even with interventions to address school non-completion (Byrne & Smyth 2010). According to Barnardos (2006), it is young people from disadvantaged areas who are the highest early school leavers. In 2009 Barnardos maintained that those who leave school

with little or no formal education, have fewer opportunities in later life, are more likely to be unemployed, have lower levels of general health and are at a greater risk of becoming involved in crime (Barnardos, 2009).

Within the Irish state one of the main reasons that affect the type of education an individual will receive along with the inequalities that are within the education system is class. Education in Ireland is class based. The upper and middle classes have the choice to either send their children to a private or public school, while the lower and working class have no option but to send their children to a public school. As Lynch (2018) pointed out the upper and middle classes have the resources to finance outside educational activities which will give their children better opportunities that education can offer (Lynch 2018).

I was not given any other opportunities. Due to my schooling in one the highest disadvantaged areas nobody had picked up that I had a hidden learning disability. There are some people who argue that having no qualifications can be seen as an imprint of difficulty rather than the central drawbacks that pressure a young person's contribution to the labour market. It is not surprising that there are no official definitions of early school leaving that a young person is entitled to complete education to a standard that would set them up for adult life or for a work force (Stokes 1995). Rather than teachers deal or learn about this I was ashamed, humiliated in front of my peers, and told that I would not amount to anything, that I would never read a book, and it was even suggested that I go and find a husband who could take care of me. I was as Best (2205), described in his book "The Other". I was made feel different to not only to the others in my class, but also within my family and the in the wider society.

Due to my anger and frustrations in school I was expelled from school while in my first year in secondary school at the age of thirteen. As I was not in school it was expected of me to go out and work. In the 1980s unemployment rate was high for those who left school with no

qualifications compared to those who had a leaving cert. Also a lot of employers at this time (mid 1980's) would ask for a birth cert, with my address been Ballymun, I never got many call backs. According to Brine (2006) your social capital and cultural capital has a lot to do with how a person is treated in society and opening doors to gaining or change your economic capital (Brine, 2006).

My first paid job was working as a scrubber, where I was paid into the hand (black market) rather than through the books. By the age of seventeen I was working in a factory on a production line, even though I was earning a decent wage I never saw my wages. My mother took my wages and gave me pocket money each week out of my wages. I do not remember ever seeing a wage slip from that employment.

Having the freedom and some money led me to having my own life. It was at this time; I became pregnant and became a young unmarried mother. Society still at his time continued to look down on unmarried mothers. I became introduced to social welfare. The local welfare officer suggested that I put the baby sleeping in a drawer rather than give me any assistance with purchasing a cot for my baby.

I was facing a life with no qualifications, relying on welfare and little or no opportunities to gain descent employment. I was totally reliant on the state for housing, health, money, and whatever benefits were going at that time. Addiction and crime was easy to fall into. It was happening all around me. I had little self-worth. I tried my utmost to give my children a different life style. I encouraged them throughout their education, and asked them to believe me how important having a leaving certificate was in order to progress in society.

### **4.3 Lone Parent**

Having the freedom from school and little bit money led me to having my own life. It was at this time; I became pregnant and became a young unmarried mother. According to ESRI early school leavers are likely to become lone-parents than individuals that have higher qualification (ESRI, 2013).

Society still at his time continued to look down on unmarried mothers. Social exclusion, I was facing a life with no qualifications and at this time of my life I became introduced to social welfare. The local community welfare officer suggested that I put my baby in a drawer rather than give me any assistance with purchasing a cot for my baby.

I had nothing and knew nothing of life at this time, never mind how to raise a child, I went to look for assistance and was made feel like I should be hiding away somewhere, this was another person I could not or knew how to speak to in authority that was looking at me as other and another. I was 'Other' and my new born child was looked at in society as the 'Other'. We were view as lower class, not only from those in authority, but also from my own family and community.

However, I became dependent on welfare and little or no opportunities to gain descent employment. I was totally reliant on the state for housing, health, money, and whatever benefits were going at that time. Addiction and crime was easy to fall into. It was happening all around me. I had little self-worth. I tried my utmost to give my children a different life style. I tried to encourage them throughout their education, yet I could never help or look at their homework. I would be sent the same note from their school as why their homework was not complete, time and time again. However, I did ask them to believe me how important having a Junior or Leaving certificate was in order to progress in society.



#### **4.4 Social Division**

Class is an issue that is in Irish society from before a child is born. If the parents of a child, particularly the mother is not well nourished nor in good health, the child comes into the world already at a disadvantage. This disadvantage will statistically continue in pre-school, primary, and secondary school. This impact will also determine whether the child as an adult will continue into third level education.

Students from any class will find accessing education challenging for many reasons such as financial, health and family difficulties, peer and family expectations. Education is a right for all children, all children will benefit from opportunities of education. This can only happen if the focus is on the student and their educational needs rather than seeing the student and what their educational needs are through the prism of their social class label.

Trinity News (2015) reported that a student will attend Trinity College if they have attended one of the fifty-one fee paying schools. They continued to report that out of the twenty-six schools that sent over half of their students to one of the two top ranking universities in Ireland were from fee paying private schools. This is creating an unfair advantage and restricting access to Ireland's top universities. Private colleges and universities do not do enough to entice students from disadvantaged and or working class areas (Trinity News, 2015).

A government initiative that was brought in at local level through state funding was Parent Child Home Programme. The programme was aimed at socially disadvantaged area for children before they began formal education. This initiative was to develop children's literacy and numeracy skills.

If you come from a good social standing people expect good things from you, while if you are from a lower social standing people expect less. In a private or middle/upper class school you

are expected to achieve A's or B's, whereas in a disadvantaged or lower/working class school no one expects as the resources are not there.

## Chapter 5

### Have You Not Gone Far Enough?

#### 5.1 Discussion of Findings

In this chapter I will discuss some of the findings from interviews I carried out with three people along with my own experience of early school leaving. One of the interviewees is an educator within adult education and will give an insight into adult education along with their own experiences in education. The two other interviewees are both mature students who are postgrad students but also have accessed adult education before becoming students at third level. I will also give some personal insights into my own experience and the impacts I faced by leaving school at a young age.

Siobhan left school at an early age through no fault of her own. Siobhan feels that at time that she was starting out in her working life barriers accessing employment was down to having no leaving cert. She continued by saying people with a leaving cert got the better jobs with higher money and they then had a status in society and within their friends. Siobhan says the only employment she could access was low paid jobs with no future outlook. Siobhan accessed adult education in her mid-twenties, as she had become a mother to her son as a teenager, and felt this was the right time to access education, as she wanted her son to see that education was the only way to access proper employment, and earn a higher wage.

Siobhan says that the biggest step in accessing adult education was finding the courage to walk into the adult education centre to inquire about courses that are aimed at just for adults. Siobhan was excluded from education because of her home situation. Even though she spent her early teenage years growing up in the leafy suburbs of Dublin, her home was a care home. Siobhan continued by saying while homed in the care home the children did not mix with society and remained within the home with very little education from a teacher.

Siobhan informed me that she managed to complete two subjects of her Junior cert when joining adult education and continued on with completing five subjects of her Leaving Cert. Siobhan said the education and understanding she received from the adult education was exceptional, it was not like sitting in a classroom as such. She said she found the reading and understanding of a play and a novel was the hardest she experienced.

Siobhan's information can be brought in with what the Further Education and Training Strategy (FET) 2014 – 2019 first five-year strategy for the further education and training sector. They maintain that a key vision which the FIT first five-year strategy for the further education and training sector, states that to improve literacy and numeracy levels amongst the population with a particular focus on providing individuals with the necessary competencies to achieve their personal, social, career and employment aspirations by promoting literacy and numeracy provision (eolas 2014).

I left school at an early age in some ways through no fault of my own. The education system back then did not or was not geared towards dealing with students with a hidden disability. When I was just eleven years old, I was diagnosed by an education psychologist that I had dyslexia. Dyslexia was seen as more of a medical matter rather than an academic matter. I was put into a special class which really at that time was more known as a dosser's class. I feel looking back now on the situation now that I was not wanted in the classroom as I was seen as a problem child who sought attention from not been able to complete most of my school work.

When joining secondary school, no provisions or resources were put in place even though the school was informed that I had dyslexia. Teachers could not understand how I was not completing any work assigned to me and therefore I was constantly in bother in school. I was seen and told I was lazy and a trouble maker, even though I myself wanted to learn. One particular teacher in the school who had never taught me really had it in for me and would pull me up for the slightest thing, I was continuously seen as trouble, not just for having dyslexia

but also from the area that I came from. Even though the school itself was in a disadvantaged area unless you were a high achiever in school you were dismissed ignored and or thought very little off.

There was never or fewer encouragements for the teachers, it was felt that schooling was only for the brighter people. I was asked to leave the school within my first year of secondary school. The school did not to or could not deal with my hidden disability. From having a hidden disability, I was seen as trouble and more so because of the area I was from. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1992, basic literacy and numeracy skills are considered to be essential for full participation in economic and social life.

They continue by saying that such skills play an important role in the lives of early school leavers. It is suggested that those that drop out of school do so partly because of literacy or numeracy problems. Those that do drop out of school will have poorer prospects as a result of their low skills (OECD 1992).

Edel managed to stay in school and complete her inter and leaving cert. She progressed into a PLC course straight after completing her leaving cert. Edel informed me that she studied a secretarial course which led her into good employment with a car dealership with a very good salary. Whilst in her mid-twenties she felt she needed a career change and studied a beautician course and qualified as a beautician. Even though Edel never worked as a beautician she felt this qualification was good to have just in case.

Edel outlined that she grew up in a highly deprived area, and education expectations was at the bottom of the list in most people's lives, Edel continued by saying how a high number of her friends had dropped out of school before completing their inter-cert as unemployment was high in the area, as people felt they had to give up school in order to seek employment of any

description. Edel says that it was her parent's persistence that kept her in school even though she wanted to follow her friends.

Edel continues by informing me that one of her twins has a hidden disability. Edel's child has a condition known as Asparagus. When Edel was seeking to enrol her children into primary school she was advised by another school to enrol her children into the disadvantaged school as these schools have more resources than the other schools. Edel says that her child receives five hours from the resource teacher, but had to fight to keep these five hours. Edel aims to make sure that her child's resource hours are not cut any further.

## **5.2 Data Analysis**

While comparing myself to Siobhan we both left school at an early age through no faults of our own. Siobhan's reason was because of her personal family situation while the reason why I left school at an early age is because I had learning difficulty that no one at that time had much knowledge of and had very little resources. We both became young teenage mothers and had barriers preventing us from getting any decent employment. Our lives were mapped out for us from the time we left education. According to Lynch (2006) individuals who have low levels of literacy do not have the means of gaining any capital as compared to those that have a good education. Edel had better capital, even though she came from a disadvantaged area she managed to stay in school and complete her leaving cert and progress into further education which in turn led her into good employment with a high wage.

Lynch (2006) also outlines that people who depend on social welfare or have a low income depend on the state to provide training to get them into the workforce. When I left school at a young age it was expected of me to gain employment of any sort. At the age of thirteen I became a scrubber. This was thought of as the lowest of the lowest employment possible. I saw it as work which would give me money. Between the age of fifteen and sixteen I did take up a

training course that was provided for by the state. I did not go into the work that I was been trained to do until later on in years.

According to Bourdieu (1984) a person's only means of creating their capital and prospering is within the market place and the only commodity the majority of people have is to sell our human labour. From the age of thirteen instead of learning or staying within the education system I sold my labour for a very low income in return. As Curry (2011) pointed out education holds the power to form an individual's life chances and it shapes your beliefs. Education can either create either critical thinking or one that conforms. How one is treated in the education system in Ireland is based on social class and the education that an individual will receive is according to social class, not one's ability, as one may feel should be the case. I came from a disadvantaged area and attended school also in a disadvantaged area.

At the age of ten when I changed schools from the North to South side of Dublin, I was asked to introduce myself to the whole class, and when the teacher asked me to spell my surname, I couldn't and the entire class laughed out loud, the teacher showed how shocked she was and asked for my mother to come to see her.

I had managed to get to ten years of age before someone finally realised, I could not spell or read at the same level of my peers. This made me feel stupid, that there was something wrong with me and or I was different to the rest. At this point of my life I was seen as different by my peers and also by my teachers. I became the 'Other'.

Best (2005) describes in his book that the 'Other' is seen as someone different, that feels that they do not fit into society. He maintains that the 'Other' shapes and influences your life within our family but also society community and the education system. I felt not only as the 'Other' in education but also within my family life, as I was the only female in a male dominating household. Then from the age of ten I felt as the 'Other' not only within my family but to the outside world when it was discovered that I as a child could not read or write. I was now seen

as special slow and felt so undeserving. I received a lot of slagging from people my own age, my family, and I felt that the teachers just disregarded me. I do believe that in this time there were little resources or aids available to the teachers in how to teach somebody with a learning difficulty or hidden disability. However, these feeling of what I experienced from such a young age has stayed with me my whole life, which was one of the main challenges that I had to overcome when I was returning to Adult Education.

As Tony who is an educator in Adult Education, described when I asked him what he thought the implications where for those who have not completed their early education, that people who have no or very little education will get lower paid work, some may get involved in drugs, and some may also experience crime and end up in the prison system. He also outlines that most people will live their lives never having the opportunity to reach their full potential. Maslow (1970) would agree with what Tony is saying. He looks at the whole physical academic social and educational virtues of the person, and how this impacts them on their learning and outcomes. Maslow has a holistic approach towards education and argued that the purpose of education and educators are about supporting, encouraging and developing the individual to reach their full potential.

As Tony described an individual with low education ties in with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory (1943). Maslow's theory created a system that was seen as a universal needs of society. A person with very poor education will impact on how the person behaves and their outcomes of live. Tony described the implications that a person may or will face from leaving school at a young age. As he said they may use take or deal drugs and may face some of their lives in criminal behaviour which may result in the person spending some of their time behind bars.

As both Maslow and Tony say the person's outcome of life will be not necessary be great. Maslow also used the terms physiological, safety, belonging and love, or social needs, esteem and self-actualization. He also explained how humans drive to become satisfied and fuller



individuals. I can identify with most of this, from the feeling that I was unworthy while I was in school because of having a learning difficulty, that I did not understand, and having nobody to understand how difficult education was for me, at the age of ten I felt I did not belong in the classroom, even though I had a longing to learn and be like my peers, I was prevented from this.

At one stage I overheard my teacher tell my mother that I did not have the mind-set and ability to sit in a classroom never sitting an exam. As outlined with Dyslexia Ireland (2001), there are many different definitions of dyslexia, but in simple terms dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty which makes it harder for some individuals to learn to read write and or spell correctly (Dyslexia Ireland 2001). Today in schools the dyslexic label is seen to give equality of opportunity to students. It has become a tool for the empowerment of dyslexic people as it allows them to access certain accommodations and provides supports which many commentators stress is needed in the school environment. It is felt that when supported, dyslexic students are made level or equal with other students (Tassie, 2010).

According to Lynch (2006), she states that Ireland has a two tier educational system – a private and a public. We can be given the illusion that education is right for everyone and that we have a choice to what school college or university we want to attend. This is a privilege for the few (Lynch 2006). Maslow's theory would have been a huge benefit for my learning and for my teachers to understand me and my learning difficulty.

Having been out of the education system for so long, it was a life choice that I engaged with adult education. The fears and the reminder of how I was treated in national school prevented me for accessing or even thinking about returning to education. I was face daily with challenges towards education when my children started school and needed help daily with their homework. I had no Irish, unable to spells a lot of words, and also not been able to read their books or bedtime stories. When the children were small, I was unable to even teach them the

basic alphabet. This was constantly an embarrassment. I did not want my children to know that I could not read or write.

Again, not just as an adult but also as a parent I became the ‘Other’. I was not like the other parents from my children’s school or outside activities. I was able to hide that I could not read or write from my children, always asking them to ask someone else within the family, or simply guessing the answers to the questions that the children had in homework. When the children were going to secondary school, I knew I was going to run into serious problems when it came to homework. I didn’t want to embarrass my children any further and decided to get the courage to attend a local adult education centre.

Tony who has worked in adult education since 2004, suggested that individuals who have a family member or a friend who has accessed adult education will inspire or encourage another family member or friend to also try adult education. They will highlight the courses available and the benefits of doing a course within adult education.

Tony also says that many community sectors have organisations that promote adult education and training along with voluntary work. He also maintains that if an individual is involved locally in one of the organisations there is a chance they will avail of education. According to Curry (2011) education holds the power to form an individual’s life’s chances and shape your beliefs (Curry 2011).

It was in the Celtic Tiger years that I returned to adult education. At this time people that were long termed unemployed were encouraged to take up places in adult education. Many adult education and community training centres were opened in Dublin because of a social policy. According to Lynch (2006), she stated that Adult Education and Community Education all play a role in providing second chance education opportunities for up skilling and also to promote equal opportunity to bring about equality and social inclusion (Lynch 2006).

My first initial engagement with adult education was a Soft Skills course. This course was ideally aimed at early school leavers who would have low level education. This course was a level 3. The course primarily targeted people that were uncomfortable sitting in a traditional class room setting. This course was the start of improving my reading and writing skills. This course was mainly based around discussion and talking and it is where I found my voice even though I thought I was voiceless. There was no time limit with this course. It depends entirely on the individual who is accessing the centre.

Although at the time I did not know I was completing something to do with education. It was only when the course instructor informed that I had just completed a level 3 FETAC. I was shocked to discover I actually enjoyed the course and the education that I received; this was a vital time piece of my life. Up until this point I had refused to take part in any class. The way the educator brought me into the class was asking me to come in and sit in on a discussion. I surprised myself by taking part in the discussion. At the end of the discussion the educator informed me I had just taken part in a class. After attending a couple of these discussions, I then felt okay about filling in their workbook, which enhanced my writing and reading skills. This was also the first time that I didn't feel judged or put down by a teacher. I felt equal to them and like I belonged in the class room. This course gave me the hunger to continue in education.

Tony outlined that the centre which he is employed by is an excellent centre for people who feel that they have been marginalized or stigmatized by society. He continued by saying that years of trial and error and the willingness to treat our students with the upmost respect which he refers to as 'client centred', has meant that they are able to provide the support and educational opportunities that this group need. Tony identified that like the clients accessing the centre he too had problems with reading and spellings. Like him the clients are motivated

to work, by completing continuous assignments which aids their spellings and gets them ready for academic work.

Tony continued by saying that the classroom is like a semi therapeutic group. He continued by saying that all staff in the centre will always check in with the clients after each class to make sure they are all okay. The centre is generally able to deal with any problems that a client may have. Tony is proud to say that a lot of the clients that come through the centre's door leave the centre ready for college. As mentioned previously the way that Tony's centre operates is similar to Maslow's approach. Maslow believed in a holistic approach towards education. He argued that the purpose of education and the educator are not only about supporting, but also encouraging and developing an individual to reach their full potential (Maslow, 1970).

Maslow also argued that if individuals have had no opportunities for a decent basic education or if they cannot find employment, or employment that has a very low income, this can lead to a bleak future and with no chance of self-actualization ever been realized (Maslow, 1954). Like Siobhan and I, who are early school leavers, both experienced low paid jobs. After a while working in these low paid jobs Siobhan realized the barriers preventing her obtaining decent employment was not having a leaving cert.

When her child had reached an age of understanding the education system, she then accessed adult education where she completed and obtained a junior cert and a leaving cert. I too did realise that the barriers for me accessing higher paid employment was having no qualifications. Whereas Edel, who did complete second level education and obtained a full inter cert and leaving certificate along with a PLC course decided herself to obtain a qualification and have it as a back-up or a just in case plan. Edel did know when finishing second level education the importance of having an education, she knew that this piece of paper would give her the opportunities in life where both Siobhan and I could not access. When I asked Tony why his students feel that they want to take part in education he answers by saying that everyone

including himself all say that they want to do something but are not sure what that is. They have a sense of wanting to reach their full potential just as Maslow pointed out in his theory.

In asking Tony what has been the outcomes of students that have moved on from adult education, he answered by stating that only a small few of students fell out of adult education but these students have always been welcomed back with open arms to continue their pathways in education. Tony proudly informs me that many of the students who accessed adult education in this centre have moved on into college and progressed into the areas of work that they choose to study. Some of the students have obtained work in many different professions such as teaching, drug workers, youth workers and yoga practioners.

My pathways in accessing adult education has brought me on a journey that I beyond my expectations. One of the adult education centres that I accessed gave me the reality of who I was and where I thought I wanted to travel to in education. This course made me face up to my dyslexia. It showed me how it was part of me and that I had the knowledge, I just got there in a different way than others. It showed me for the first time in my life how my dyslexia was a unique gift and not just a disability. For the first time I was not ashamed of my dyslexia. I knew I could do education like anyone else and that dyslexia is not a block but a gift when you understand how to work with it.

According to the Department of Education and Skills in Ireland up to ten per cent of the population have dyslexia, with an average of three children in every classroom have dyslexia. The Dyslexia Association of Ireland calls for services for adults that have dyslexia. Even though there may be some resources in place for children, there is no corresponding accessible assessment services for adults. The adult education centres and other adult education providers, do provide adult literacy supports, but they do not have the resources to look at the volumes of needs of adult dyslexia is limited (Dyslexia Association of Ireland 2001).

I asked Tony at what age did he finish school at. Tony informed me he also was an early school leaver. He left school at the age of fourteen. Tony continued by informing me that he ended up in prison at an early age. While he was in prison Tony started to explore education that the prison system provided. From this he studied an undergraduate course with Open University part time over eight years and successfully obtain an Arts Degree. Tony continued by saying how his experience with education was amazing. He says the support he received from his peers and the tutors from the Open University was exceptional. Tony acknowledges that he was highly motivated and also prepared to work hard to get what he wanted.

I can identify with Tony. I was thirteen leaving education. After so many years attending adult education I successfully gained a place at a third level institution. Starting out on this journey terrified me. I had convinced myself that I would not fit in with the other students, that they would not like me because not only was I was a mature student but I was a student with a hidden disability, and that I came from a disadvantaged area. I believed people like me did not go to university. Thankfully within the first semester some of those fears left me. There were people just like me also studying in the university.

Towards the end of second year I finally spoke to a lecturer. It wasn't that I feared them it was more they were of the higher class where I was at the lower end. I would have felt that I did not have the proper language skills to communicate with them at their level. Sometimes it still amazes me that I actually own a degree. Me who was once laughed at by the entire class when I was ten years old because I couldn't spell my own surname. Me who had overheard my teacher tell my mother I had not got the mind-set to sit in a classroom or complete any schooling. And me who had struggled my whole life feeling I was different to others as I struggled with basic reading and writing.

Asking Siobhan this question she too would identify with Tony and I. Siobhan left school at fourteen. It took her a few years to study at third level. She was proud of the fact that she had

completed her junior cert and leaving cert. Like me she too had the fears that I had when starting her journey through third level. Siobhan acknowledges how it is a great achievement to be able to study at university, but can be very challenging especially if you do not come from an academic background, but this can also make you work harder and can give you the determination to get what you have set out to achieve.

In Bell Hook's book on Education, *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), she spoke about how even though she attends a college she always felt on the outside. She argues that girls who came from poor backgrounds tried to fit in with the wealthy girls by using their beauty or style. Bell did not have the finances that other students had. She only befriended girls who were not wealthy in her first year in college; there was very few students from the working-class background in college.

In the question that I ask Tony on what are the significant factors of everyday life that shape or influence your attendance and advancing within this education programme, he told me that having a roof over your head is one of the important factors. Along with legitimate money no crime and or no looking over your shoulder. He continued by saying that teachers and friends who will always be there when the going gets tough, and having a shoulder to cry on is also a huge factor as Tony explained that these are the most important factors because when you are down you need someone to notice and these people usually do.

Tony also acknowledges that within the adult education setting, that these influence your performance in the classroom. He continued by saying we all look after one another. We watch out to see if anyone is not doing well and we all would encourage them and offer whatever support they need. Tony is also keen to point out that the classroom in his setting is friendly where everyone is welcomed. I asked Tony where there any other influences that would interest him to attend other education programmes. Tony answered by joking but also serious that if he was offered a free doctorate that he might consider returning.

As Tony outlines about the care and supports that are offered in adult education I was tasked with a situation while I was working in a classroom in the same adult education setting. On one particular day the country was on a high alert with an orange weather warning in place. There were students in the classroom that were homeless. I was tasked with the question how do you teach a class that are worried about how to stay dry before they can check into the hostel at 8pm. The centre was closing at 4pm, some of the students discussed that they were going to use the city centre library that was opened late, as the shops and cafes were all planning to close their doors at 6pm to facilitate staff getting home safely.

As Maslow outlines in his Deficiency needs vs Growth needs (1943) he argues that deficiency needs arise due to deprivation and are said to motivate people when they are unmet. In the people that I spoke to like Tony and Siobhan their needs were not met when they left school early. By Tony's needs not been met resulted in Tony spending some of his life in prison, and Siobhan became a single mother while she was a teenager. Nor was my needs met when at the age of ten years old I was laughed at by my peers and dismissed by people in authority instead of identifying my needs.

As Maslow explains (1943), the more a person needs are denied the more motivation is growing within a person. As outlined with the individuals that I spoke to and along with myself education was the biggest basic needs that we all experienced. Maslow also outlines that individuals must satisfy lower level deficit needs before progressing on to meet higher level growth needs. So therefore, Tony Siobhan, Edel and myself all individually accessed and identified what our own needs were in order to progress into third level education by accessing adult education and identifying how early school leaving impacted all of our lives, in order to progress within the rest of society. Just as Maslow argued when a deficit need has been more or less satisfied it will go away, and our activities become routinely directed towards meeting the next set of needs that we have yet to satisfy.



These then become our silent needs. However, growth needs continue to be felt and may even become stronger once they have been engaged. This growth that Maslow identifies relates to all my interviewees along with myself as all of us continued into third level education and reaching and completing post graduate level (Maslow 1943).

*"Our deepest fear is not that we are weak. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. You're playing small does not serve the world ... As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."*

*Nelson Mandela*

## Chapter 6

### 6.1 CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to give the reader an understanding of how do adult early school leavers understand, negotiate, perform, within the adult and community education learning environment. The research aimed to capture the effects of the experiences of early school leaving and the impact this has on individuals within adult learners and what they encounter in a contemporary Dublin classroom environment. The research also aimed to look at what supports there are for individuals that are early school leavers. It also looked are what supports are currently available and what access is available for individuals who are within the adult and community education setting.

The data that was collected demonstrates how individuals will have to use their own resources to progress through life after leaving school so young. Many households in Ireland are affected by early leaving school leaving. The majority of early school leavers come from a working-class background. The literature was able to tell us that the literacy and numeracy skills that are thought to us in our school years stand to us when seeking employment, and therefore early school leavers do not gain the literacy and numeracy skills that is needed for employment and therefore have very low choices in proper employment. From the data that was collected all the individuals who left school early had experienced very poor employment. This research has given a small percentage of the population who are early school leavers a voice in Ireland.

This research gave an account of my own experiences of leaving school early. An auto-enography method is used throughout this paper. An auto-enography gives my versions and accounts of my own schooling and tries to give an understanding as to why the I left school early. At the time the I was a pupil in national school, no understanding was given by any of the teachers that I had encountered, and therefore I was labelled as a lazy troublesome child. I

had a hidden disability known as dyslexia, which meant reading, writing, and spellings was a huge barrier for me to achieve in school. In this paper I outline how I got as far as fourth class in national school when it was discovered that the I could not spell my own surname. This research also tells how schools back then had very little or no resources to use for children that had any disabilities.

According to some of the literature that has been reviewed in this research paper, education gives individuals opportunities to change and grow their social capital, cultural capital, human capital and economic capital. The research tells us that families who have poor employment will suffer financial hardship when trying to fund their children into all levels of education. Unlike privileged parents who are finding ways to give their children unfair advantages in education in an unequal economical society. Kathleen Lynch who is a professor of equality studies in UCD, has called for a systematic review and regulations of the private for profit education market in Ireland at all levels of education.

Completing this research has helped me find my voice, academically and personally. Speaking to the other interviewees it was easy to identify what they also experienced by leaving school early. The two individuals who had left school early worked in poor employment, while one individual spent some time in prison. It was clear so see that as these people matured and realised that the barriers preventing them for gaining decent employment was the fact that they had like myself a poor level of education which was preventing them to progress within society. Having got the courage to call into an adult education setting was the opening for all of us to access education as an adult, and the fears we had of the classroom was gradually fading away, and soon a place that I felt terror became a place of pleasure. From speaking to Edel I was surprised that she had not only managed to stay in school even though she lived in a highly unemployed area, but that she also went on to further education and into high paid employment and then gaining herself a qualification increasing her human capital.

Finally, this thesis explored emotions that I did not know I had or how they shaped my life or held me back. I was able to see a clear link between the impact of early school leaving and the value of adult education. This journey of auto-ethnography has opened and closed a lot of doors for me. I have found my place in me, and value of me, is something I will carry with joy!

---

**Bibliography**

Adult Education 2019 <https://www.adulteducationireland.ie/#> last accessed June 26<sup>th</sup> at 13:05pm

Alcock. Pete,(2006).*Understanding Poverty*. Third Edition, Palgrave Macmillan, UK.

Andersen, M. and Hill Collins, P. (eds) (2010). *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

**Black, I. (2006). *The presentation of interpretivist research*. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*,9(4), 319-324.**

Boeije. H. (2014). *Analysis in qualitative research*. 1st ed. London: SAGE.

Bryman. Alan. (2012). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX26DP, UK.

Baker, J., Lynch, K., Cantillon, S. and Walsh, J. (2004). *Equality: From Theory to Action*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Best. Shaun.(2005). *Understanding social Divisions*, Sage, London.

Bilton.Tony,Bonnett. Kevin,Jones.Pip Skinner. David, Stanworth Michelle and Weber Andrew. (1996). *Introductory Sociology*. Palgrave, Houndmills,Basingstoke, Hampshire, RG216XS.

Björklund A, Salvanes KG. (2011). Chapter 3 - Education and Family Background: Mechanisms and Policies. In: Eric A. Hanushek SM, Ludger W (eds). *Handbook of the Economics of Education*, vol Volume 3. Elsevier, pp 201-247. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-444-53429-3.00003-X>

Bourdieu. Pierre, (1984). *Distinctions: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*.

Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu. Pierre, (1986). "*The Forms of Social Capital*." Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education, edited by John Richardson. New York: Greenwood Press.

Brine, Jacky (2006). *Lifelong learning and the knowledge economy*: those that know and those that do not. The discourse of the European Union. British Educational Research Journal. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge.

Citizens Information. (2019),

[https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/primary\\_and\\_post\\_primary\\_education/attendance\\_and\\_discipline\\_in\\_schools/school\\_attendance.html](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/primary_and_post_primary_education/attendance_and_discipline_in_schools/school_attendance.html) last accessed June 30th at 11:24am

Clough, P. T. (1998). *The end(s) of ethnography*. New York: Peter Lang.

Combat Poverty. (2008). *Tackling Financial Exclusion in Ireland*. Dublin: Combat Poverty.

Considine, Mairead, Dukelow, Fiona, (2009). *Irish Social Policy*. Gill & Macmillan Ltd, Dublin. MPG Books Group.

Curry, John, (2011), *Irish Social Services, Institute of Public Administration*, 57-61

Lansdowne Road, Dublin 4.

Department of Education and Science (2004). *A Brief Description of the Irish Education System*. website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) Published by Communications Unit Department of Education and Science January 2004, soused on 9 of January 2019.

Department of Education and Science (2000). *Learning for life: White paper on adult education*. Dublin: Government Publications.

Department of Education and skills, <https://www.education.ie/en/> soured April 2019.

England. Paula, (2010). *THE GENDER REVOLUTION: Uneven and Stalled. Gender and Society*. Sage Publications, Inc. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27809263>

Fleming, T. & Murphy, M. (2000). *Squaring the Circle*. Dublin: Dublin Employment Pact.

Freire, Paulo. (2017). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London: Penguin.

Giddens, A. (2009). *Poverty, Social Exclusion and Welfare*. In *Sociology* (6th ed.). UK: Polity Press.

Giddens. Anthony (2006). *Sociology*, Polity Press, 65 Bridge Street, Cambridge, CB21UR, UK.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of the self in everyday life*, New York: Ancho Books.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, New York: Doubleday.

Hardiman. Fergal, (2012). *'Finding A Voice' The experience of mature students in a college of Further Education*. Education Doctorate. National University of Ireland Maynooth Faculty of Social Sciences.

Hennink, M., Hutter, I. and Bailey, A. (2015). *Qualitative research methods*. 1st ed London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Hook. Bell, (1993). "*Black women and feminism*", in Richardson, Laurel; Taylor, Verta A. (eds.), *Feminist frontiers III*, New York: McGraw-Hill.

Hooks, Bell. (1994) .*Teaching to Transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. London/New York: Routledge.

Lawlor, S. (2005). "*The making of middle class identities*" *The sociological review*.

Lee.D. Newby,H (1983).*The Problem of Sociology*. Hutchinson, London, England.

Lynch, K. (2000). '*Research and Theory on Equality in Education*', in M. Hallinan, ed., *Handbook of Sociology of Education*. New York: Plenum Press.

Lynch. Donal, (2016). *The old boys' club*: Sunday Indo Life Magazine.Independent.ie

Last accessed on Monday 27 May 2019.

**Lynch, K. and O'Neill, C. (1994) '*The Colonisation of Social Class in Education*', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*.**

Lynch, Kathleen and Anne Lodge. (2002). *Equality and Power in Schools*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Lynch, Kathleen and Baker, John (2005). *Equality in education: an equality of condition perspective*. Publication information Theory and Research in Education, Publisher Sage Publications.

Marx, K.(1844),*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Edited by Michael Milligan, Dover Publications Incorporated, New York.

**Maslow, A. H. (1943). *A Theory of Human Motivation. Psychological Review***



**Maslow, A (1954). *Motivation and personality*. New York, NY: Harpe**

**Maslow, A. H. (1970). *Motivation and personality*. New York: Harper & Row.**

May, Tim. (2004), *Social Research, Issues methods and process*. Oxford University Press, McGraw-Hill Education house, Shoppenhangers Road, Maidenhead, Berkshire, SL62QL, UK.

Maynooth University Research Ethics Policy (2016). Ethical Review and

Research Integrity General Policy Statement [Moodle online] .

Maynoothuniversity.ie. (2019). [Accessed 5 January. 2019].

Merriam,B,Sharan. Caffarella,S, Rosemary &. Baumgartner M Lisa.(2007). *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*. Jossey Bass, A Wiley Imprint, 989 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103-1741.

Murphy, M. & Fleming, T. (2000). Between common and college knowledge: Exploring the boundaries between adult and higher education. National University of Ireland Maynooth, Ireland. Studies in Continuing Education.

O'Leany, Zina. (2014). *The Essential Guide To Doing Your Research Project*. 1st ed. Los Angeles (California) [etc.]: Sage.

O'Mahony, Paul (1997) *Mountjoy Prisoners: A Sociological and Criminological Profile* Dublin: Stationery Office

O'Neill, Cathleen, and Combat Poverty Agency. (1992). *Telling it like it is*. Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.

**Reed-Danahay, D. E. (1997). *Auto/ethnography: Rewriting the self and the social*. Oxford, UK:Berg.**

Savage et al,(2015). *Social class in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. UK: Penguin.

Seabrook, J., (2002), '*No-Nonsense guide to Class. Caste & Hierarchies*' Pub. Verso.

Sen, Amartya (1999). *Choice, Welfare, and Measurement*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Silverman, D. (1993), *Beginning Research, Interpreting Qualitative Data, Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction*. Londres: Sage Publications.

Silverman, D. (2008). *Qualitative research*. 1st ed. London: Sage.

SOLAS. (2014). *Further Education and Training Strategy*; The Department of Education and Skills. Dublin: Government Publications.

Stubbs, W. (1994). 'Quality in Higher Education a Funding Council Perspective.' In Green, D. (Ed). *What is Quality in Higher Education?* Bristol: Taylor and Francis.

**Tassie. Nicola, (2010). An Exploration of Meanings Attributed to a Dyslexia Diagnosis. School of Applied Social University College, Cork, Ireland.**

**Wall, S. (2006). An autoethnography on learning about autoethnography. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 5(2), Article 9. Retrieved September 10, 2006 from [http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/5\\_2/html/wall.htm](http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/5_2/html/wall.htm)**

Young, Iris. Marion. (1990), *Justice and the Politics of Different, five faces of oppression*, Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press.

## **Publications.**

Thejournal.ie april 20th (2018,11:59pm). Journal Media Ltd. 483632.

Read more at: <https://www.skillsyouneed.com/learn/research-proposal.html>

Read more at: <https://www.skillsyouneed.com/learn/research-methods-intro.html>

## **Quotes**

Mandela, Nelson, 18 Inspiring Nelson Mandela Quotes – Mondetta Charity Foundation.

<http://www.mondettacharityfoundation.org/18-inspiring-nelson-mandela-quotes/> sourced on

April 2019.